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U.S. Can Act to Prevent Violations of Its Security

By ROY GODSON

Here we are again, reeling in disbelief from the latest espionage revelations and the severe damage that has been suffered by our country.

Our outrage is heightened by a sense of betrayal that some of our Marines in Moscow have apparently fallen victim to the oldest ploy in the world's second-oldest profession. In the process, according to press accounts, some of our most important secrets have been laid bare—diplomatic negotiations on arms control, high-level preparations for U.S.-Soviet summitry, contact with dissidents and even more fundamental procedures dealing with crisis management and our secret communications procedures that may extend well beyond the operations of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow.

Already some in Congress and the executive branch have rushed forward to assign or deflect blame and to suggest procedural palliatives. Indeed, President Reagan said on Tuesday that the United States would not occupy the new embassy under construction in Moscow until it is deemed secure, and he announced other steps to investigate the problems brought on by the spying and sex scandal.

But there are much more fundamental questions that ought to be asked, and unless they are answered, and answered well, there will be many more intelligence shocks in the future.

Why have the Soviets and other intelligence services managed to employ classical espionage techniques against us so successfully, and why has the United States had such difficulty in countering the seemingly well-understood threats?

First, it is our attitude. Up until we were hit in the face by the "Year of the Spy," the predominant view was that we didn't have a problem. Many serious Americans find it difficult to believe that espionage is another form of conflict waged daily against us by our enemies—and sometimes by our friends. Yet for much of world history espionage has been a normal state of affairs. In the closing years of the 20th Century it will remain part of state-to-state relations conducted by those who, unlike us, make little distinction between times of war and peace. Until we accept this reality we will not make much headway in defending ourselves.

There are no quick fixes or simple solutions, however. The attacks being waged daily by hundreds of intelligence services against U.S. installations, technology and our political system are complex: the defense also will have to be.

A number of measures have been proposed by a few people in and out of government who just a few years ago were castigated for their efforts. These measures now need to be heeded.

To start with, we must cut down on the foreign intelligence presence in the United States and in our sensitive facilities abroad. The number of hostile intelligence personnel has grown enormously in the United States itself since the 1960s, and their presence in our facilities abroad is graphically illustrated by the seductions in Moscow. The Administration began to take action in 1986 with the expulsion of some Soviet personnel, but much more needs to be done.

We must also implement some serious security-awareness programs. Relatively few of the more than 6 million Americans who have or recently had access to sensitive information are briefed seriously concerning the hostile intelligence threat and the fate of those who succumb to temptation. Very few security precautions are taken—for example, when such personnel travel abroad, even to well-known KGB meeting places such as Mexico City and Vienna. Again, the Reagan Administration began implementing security-awareness programs in recent years, but already there have been cutbacks in the bureaucracies so that in reality very little has been accomplished.

Increasing counterintelligence and security countermeasures in proportion to budget increases in other national-security areas would help. If we spend billions to develop new defense hardware, it makes sense to improve the protection, too. We should establish centrally coordinated national-level counterintelligence analysis in order to understand and respond to the threat in a systematic, across-the-board manner. Treating any event involving security at one of our embassies as an "isolated" event is a perilous gamble. We should make somebody responsible for ensuring overall security. Committees and interagency groups are almost never accountable for their actions—or the lack of them.

Some of these proposals were put forward years ago—and for the most part were shelved. This is strange, because at other times in our history, beginning in the Revolutionary War, the United States has been able to respond effectively to hostile intelligence threats and has done so without sacrificing our liberties and values.

It is now far past time for senior U.S. officials to recognize what most Americans can tell from reading the daily newspapers: We face a formidable systematic threat to our security from foreign intelligence services, but one that is not beyond our capability to counter.

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